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ABSTRACT

Personal narratives provide typically unabashed enthusiasm for sabbatical leave programs, but few studies have explored the results of sabbaticals and the impact that these sabbaticals can and do have on the department and the university. This paper reports on the creation of an assessment instrument to measure the impact of a faculty member's sabbatical. Using a protocol suggested by D. Ary, L. Jacobs, and A. Razavieh (1996), researchers asked five faculty members who had taken sabbaticals in previous years to participate in a focus group discussion. The focus group process identified five categories as important to understanding the success of a sabbatical. At a second meeting they reached consensus about the items to be included in a survey of a sabbatical's institutional impact, and at a third session they reviewed and validated the instrument. The survey was field tested through the responses of 10 other faculty members, and plans were made to administer the survey to individuals who had taken sabbaticals and members of their departments. The survey is appended. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Creation and Validation of a Sabbatical Assessment Instrument

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Abstract

Sabbaticals are often seen as somewhat controversial in terms of the outputs or outcomes of the experience. While personal narratives provide typically unabashed enthusiasm for the leave programs, little documentation has explored the results of sabbaticals and the impact that these sabbaticals can and do have on the surrounding department and university. The current discussion reports the creation of an assessment instrument for use to measure the impact of a faculty member's sabbatical.

The sabbatical leave program has been traced to Harvard in the late-1800's and the need for a faculty hiring incentive (Meehan, 1999). Over the past 100 years, the leave program has been systematized, and today most colleges and universities make use of some form of sabbatical leave. The most traditional format of sabbatical is the granting of one academic year off while receiving half-pay, or one academic semester off while receiving full-pay (Zahorski, 1991). Boening (1996) noted at one case study institution that the sabbatical application process is largely based on lines of authority, with departmental or college committees making recommendations through an academic unit or college, with final authority for approval being vested in the college provost. Boening found in his case study that the majority of sabbaticals awarded were in the disciplines comprising the liberal arts, humanities, and hard sciences.

Sabbaticals have been seen as increasingly controversial for many reasons, particularly due to administrative use of the leave programs. The result in many states has been consideration of legislation or system-wide regulations defining who can be eligible for a sabbatical and under what circumstances the sabbatical can

be taken (Lively, 1993). Another problem associated with sabbaticals is the lack of a formal product or outcome from the sabbatical experience. Although faculty report completing the objectives associated with their project (Sima & Denton, 1995), outcome products are both difficult to identify and measure (Miller & Kang, 1998). In an exploratory study of assessment measures for sabbaticals, chief academic officers identified 16 assessment criteria, although these measures were largely summative in nature and were not developed to measure the assessments (Bai, Miller, & Newman, 2000).

The need for institutional self-review of sabbaticals is important for several reasons. First, if institutions do not regulate their own activities, then outside bodies, whether they be systems, legislatures, or accrediting bodies, will be tempted to regulate them. Second, in an increasingly constant attempt to function efficiently, institutions need to be cautious and serious about what they provide as faculty development. In this examination, then, institutions need to reflect and assess on the impact of sabbaticals. Third, considering scarce fiscal resources, institutions need to ask whether or not sabbaticals provide a good 'rate-of-return' for the fiscal investment. And fourth, institutions have a responsibility

to their public or constituency, and need to consider how their behaviors reflect to these external constituents. The result, and the purpose for this discussion, is to create a mechanism to assess the impact of a sabbatical experience within the confines of an individual institution. This presents several immediate assumptions and limitations, most notably that the faculty member receiving a sabbatical may have a tremendous impact on a profession or professional association, but may have very little impact on the campus.

The design of the assessment instrument was intended to reflect the needs of one metropolitan research university that enrolled over 20,000 students, and subsequently, the resulting instrument may not be appropriate for all institutions. Additionally, the institution employs a competitive sabbatical application process, and this may result in potential competitive feelings among faculty who compete for the same sabbatical "slots."

Instrument Design

Utilizing a protocol suggested by Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1996), a panel of five faculty members (three full professors and two associate professors) who had

received sabbaticals in previous years at case study institution were asked to participate in focus group discussion. These individuals were nominated from the provost's office for having a very positive and good reputation for successful sabbaticals.

During the first meeting, participants shared copies of their sabbatical proposals and talked openly about what they did, what they accomplished, and what they reported as accomplished during their sabbaticals. Of the five faculty members, two had taken a sabbatical within the past three years, and the other three had taken theirs within the last seven years. The participants were also given a copy of the Bai, Miller, and Newman (2000) article and were asked to reflect on what outcomes of a sabbatical should look like. At the close of the two-hour meeting, they identified the following five categories as important to understanding the success of a sabbatical: were objectives met, improved teaching, improved research, improved campus citizenship, and an overall impact. The focus group was disbanded to meet again two weeks later.

When the focus group reconvened, they brainstormed a listing of up to five measures for each of the categories they had identified in their previous meeting. Working on a blackboard rated each item as being an effective and

central component to measuring a whether a sabbatical had an impact on the department, college, or university. Each of these measures were then prioritized and the focus group debated the merit of each measure as an appropriate survey stem to ask others about a sabbatical's impact. As each of the five focus group members represented different academic departments, Converse and Presser's (1986) concern about professional and cultural differences were addressed. The focus group concluded their second two-hour meeting with consensus of the items to be included in the survey of a sabbatical's institutional impact.

The focus group met a third and final time to validate their earlier decision about what was to be included in the survey instrument. The group agreed that the instrument questions met the four-part test of practical standards outlined by Fraenkel and Wallen (1990), and they decided that the items were accurate reflections of the intent of the larger question about the impact of a sabbatical. They also agreed that the questions were clearly stated and would be easy for students, faculty members, and administrators to respond to.

Field Testing the Instrument

Consistent with the recommendation of Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1996), the survey was field-tested with ten other past-sabbatical recipients. Respondents were asked to review the instrument, suggest changes, and specifically review the wording of each item. The ten faculty members indicated they were comfortable with the wording, indicated that none of the items were confusing, believed the instructions were clear, and reported that the survey, when taken seriously and with thought, would take no more than ten minutes to complete.

Future Research

As the survey was finalized, plans were being made to distribute the survey instrument to the individual an individual who received a sabbatical, the individual's department chair and other department chairs and deans in the college, fellow faculty colleagues, students in the sabbatical-recipient's classes, and individuals from around campus, including those serving on committees with the sabbatical-recipient and individuals in the office of faculty/academic affairs. Collected data could then be analyzed in several different ways, include direct comparisons between similar cells (students vs. other

college faculty; students vs. faculty colleagues; faculty colleagues vs. administrators; etc.).

Data were intended to be collected in the late-spring of 2002, providing data analysis to the individual faculty member and those in sabbatical policy formation early in the fall 2002 semester. Data were also intended to help create an environment of best practice, where the sabbaticals with the highest impact in each area could be showcased and shared with others looking to develop a successful leave.

The entire survey was also predicated on the assumption that faculty members communicate with those around them, and that they talk about things like their research, citizenship, and teaching. The categorization of sabbatical outcomes provides a strong first step in conveying an institutional expectation that sabbaticals are indeed supposed to have an outcome that benefits the institution. And this is where the initial conversation about sabbaticals began; institutional self-responsibility for faculty development programs.

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Survey of a Sabbatical's Impact

In the Fall 2002 Dr. Bill Johnson of the Department of Education took a sabbatical to complete research work at Stanford University. The nature of the research work was a combination of library access, clinical observation, and technology experimentation. We are attempting to evaluate the impact that his sabbatical leave has had those around him, including chairs, students, administrators, and faculty colleagues from around campus. He has been involved in every aspect of developing this survey, and is open and anxious to have critical feedback.

Your responses to the following questions will be held in strictest confidence and only group data will be reported. Please use the following scale in responding to each survey item: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. Please circle the N/A if you have no basis for making an agreement-based response to the item.

Objectives

1.	He achieved the goals he set for his sabbatical.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
2.	His objectives were unique to a sabbatical experience.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
3.	His sabbatical is seen as a meaningful experience.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Teaching

As a result of his sabbatical, Dr. Johnson

4.	Is a better teacher.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
5.	Provides more up-to-date resource material.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
6.	Is better at student assessment.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Research

As a result of his sabbatical, Dr. Johnson

7.	Is a more productive scholar.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
8.	Has a better grasp of cutting-edge issues.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
9.	Makes a significant contribution to the profession.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Campus Citizenship

As a result of his sabbatical, Dr. Johnson

10.	Is a more participative campus citizen.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
11.	Is a higher quality campus participant.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
12.	Is more willing to take on more leadership roles in campus service.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Overall Impact

As a result of his sabbatical, Dr. Johnson

13.	Has a better attitude about working here.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
14.	Inspires others to do better.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
15.	Is a better faculty member.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Thank you for your participation in the study!

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